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The school crisis in Norfolk, Virginia, lasted five months during which time 10,000 children were denied education because of closed schools. Fewer than 4,500 students went to make-shift tutoring groups; 1,600 of them transferred to schools outside the city. School closing disrupted family life, weakened community relations, and hurt business.

The most significant failure in the Norfolk school crisis was that of established leadership. Virginia's Governor had made it clear in his gubernatorial campaign that public schools would be closed before they would be allowed to open as integrated institutions. Yet most people were reluctant to face the fact that integration was upon them and that the State policy represented an impending danger to public education. In the summer of 1958, before the crisis in the fall, a handful of men and women, who later formed the Norfolk Committee for Public Education, went to the mayor to discuss the coming school situation. Although greeted with acceptance and good will, these people were told that it was not yet time for the appearance of a public education group. Even though they had never intended to accept full responsibility for the movement, the rank and file, middle-class members of the Norfolk Committee for Public Education became the leaders, while the elected power structure sat in silence. Backed by the legal decisions of the Federal court, the teachers who refused to join the segregationist private school movement and the ministers and business-ment who spoke out succeeded in opening the schools in February 1959.

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Crisis in Norfolk

By
JANE REIF

Virginia Council on Human Relations

PREFACE

During the five months the ten thousand children were locked out of school in Norfolk, less than 4500 students went to make-shift tutoring groups which met in private homes and in some church buildings. 1600 of them transferred to other schools, some near by, but most of the schools were spread from Connecticut to California. Most of these students did not return. There was no school for approximately one-third of the locked out students. School closing disrupted family life, weakened community relations and hurt business.

The story of what happened in Norfolk has been reported in our nation's press, and told over radio and television. The more important question, and a far more difficult question to answer—if people are to learn from this experience—is not "what" but "why." Why were so many citizens of Virginia's largest city apathetic about their closed schools? Why did it take four months of closed schools for many citizens and business leaders to realize the fact that public schools are an economic and educational necessity? Why did the events follow the pattern they did? These are the difficult questions which author Jane Reif tries to answer in her story about the "Crisis in Norfolk."

Norfolk is not a typical Southern city. It is a representative of elements which, while primarily Southern, are as diverse as are the United States. Thus, the attitude of citizens here, before and during the "Crisis," was a surprise to many people. Virginia's Governor had made it clear in his campaign for Governor that public schools would be closed before they would be allowed to open integrated. Yet most people were reluctant to face the fact that there was no choice. Some believed something had to be done in order to prevent a tragedy but their concern went unheeded. It was as if we saw a tidal wave bearing down on us, and no one would listen to our shouts and look to see the impending danger. Finally our only hope was that the impact of the wave, of closed schools, might awaken people to reality. The awakening came slowly.

It was discovered that most people (even respected leaders of the community) in a time of crisis wanted to stay out of politics or anything controversial. The result of this vacuum allowed the crisis to deepen. It is interesting that in the period of time since the beginning of the crisis, there has been a growing interest in civic affairs evidenced by citizens who were never before interested in these things. This new political interest has changed the political framework—and may have an increasing influence on civic affairs for years to come.

The opening of Norfolk's six closed secondary schools, February 1959, after being closed for five months, is only one chapter in a story which began some time ago, and is far from being concluded. What happened during the school year 1958-59 to open public schools, and since that time to keep them open, is but a small part of the greater battle to save public education in Virginia.

JAMES BREWER, *Vice President*
Virginia Council on Human Relations

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CHAPTER I

The City of Norfolk

On nearly any street in Norfolk there were families from all points of the national compass. Search a shade harder and you would find foreign families, too. Norfolk is the headquarters of NATO, and a great seaport whose Hampton Roads is the world's foremost natural harbor. In Norfolk a French family might live next door to a couple from Steubenville, Ohio. Oriental families were accepted in white neighborhoods, and there was more than one Norfolk family who had adopted children of mixed Oriental ancestry.

Norfolk was a unique city in other ways. Its economic life was bolstered by the $5,000,000 monthly payroll of the working Navy. Over one-third of its population represented the liberalizing trend found in Navy-connected families, largely non-Southern in origin. Norfolk was considered a cosmopolitan, even an enlightened, city of the South. Norfolk's racial balance, 27% Negro and 73% white, meant a Negro population large enough to provide leadership, but not so large as to be believed to threaten established patterns.

In the largest city in Virginia—Norfolk's 330,000 by-passed even Richmond's population—the history of race relations was good. While most Norfolk Negroes were of low economic status, there was a growing middle-class. Opportunities for non-discriminating job openings, such as in government service, were broader than in many other Southern cities and towns.

True, there were separate schools and separate beaches and separate rest rooms. But the separation never seemed as strong as in many other areas of the South. Negro customers were treated with the same courtesy shown white shoppers in downtown stores.

More than 20 boards devoted to welfare, health, religion, and education were interracial.

In 1955, Norfolk Catholic High School had been integrated without incident and with little comment from the public or the press. Two years before, Catholic elementary schools had been quietly and "unofficially" integrated. In June of 1959, for the first time, the Catholic high school graduated Negro students, six, in a class of 86.

Fourteen years before—in 1945—the Women's Interracial Council had been started by a handful of Negro and white women, who met on a monthly basis to promote good will between the races. Through the years their number had increased to over 463 active members. The Norfolk Ministers' Association was interracial, as was the smaller Norfolk Ministers' Fellowship.

While these few encouraging signs gave evidence of the temper of the unwritten truce between Norfolk's colored and white citizens, there were other signs not so congenial or hopeful. Seashore State Park, a vast wooded area overlooking Chesapeake Bay, to the east of the city, had been closed for over four years. It had fallen victim to the legal battle between the forces who sought to integrate it and the Commonwealth of Virginia, which preferred to see it closed and useless rather than open to both races.

Norfolk, for all its surface sophistication, was caught in the estab-

lished Southern pattern of life. Add to this the state's massive resistance laws and the apathy of the city's residents toward any important issue, let alone a controversial one. The result was a city unprepared for crisis. Since the decision of 1954, no single step had been taken in Norfolk to educate or acclimate its citizens to the legal inevitability of desegregation.

Opposing these attitudes and circumstances was the desire of Norfolk to be an outstanding, progressive city, which it was in many ways. The city's urban redevelopment plans, for example, were among the broadest, most aggressive in the country. The energies, intellects, and emotions that should have been channeled into progress were used instead to split the city into two camps: those who opposed desegregation; and those who supported public schools and, even if reluctantly, accepted desegregation.

There were people who understood the Supreme Court decision of 1954 and its ramifications. But they refused to believe that Norfolk schools would have to be integrated or that public schools could be closed. They refused to believe that trouble could come to their city—a good city in many ways. They placed too much faith in the hands of local and state politicians who had promised them A Plan, any plan, to circumvent the Supreme Court's legal call for desegregation in the South.

The Legal Dilemma

By mid-summer of 1958 distant rumblings became big, bold letters on the wall. If the federal court forced Norfolk to accept Negro children in its white schools, the state's massive resistance laws would automatically close those schools. These laws would cut off all state education funds to the locality involved the moment a single Negro child was enrolled in a white school. Norfolk was trapped in a dilemma not of its own choosing, but part of its own making.

August rolled sluggishly along. Norfolk is a hot, humid, mist-clad city in the late summer. Department stores ran ads for school clothes. Mothers registered their children at pre-school clinics. High school boys and girls had one last fling in the surf over Labor Day, 1958. They were to enter Granby High or Maury High or Norview High the following week.

While the major portion of Norfolk's population thought and behaved as if nothing were happening—or were going to happen—the Norfolk School Board struggled with the federal court. One hundred and fifty-one Negroes had applied for white schools. The School Board rejected all applications. Federal Judge Walter E. Hoffman sent the rejections back to the Board, asking it to reconsider in view of the Supreme Court decision. The Board reconsidered.

The beleaguered School Board had tried to act constructively in the tight situation. Its members genuinely wanted schools open. They were quick to see that no legal course was possible to them other than court-ordered desegregation. They were supported by the courageous School Superintendent, J. J. Brewbaker. Mr. Brewbaker defended public education repeatedly in the press and in private. It is thought his

influence helped the School Board in their decision to reconsider the Negro applications. (It is conceded also that Superintendent Brewbaker's retirement, effective June, 1960, prior to legal retirement age, is the direct result of his participation in the school crisis at this point and later on.)

By verbal commitment to the U. S. District Court and Judge Hoffman, 17 Negro children were admitted to six all-white Norfolk schools. The die was cast in Norfolk.

The first week in September came—and went. All Norfolk schools remained closed. The second week in September school doors remained locked. On September 22, Norfolk's segregated elementary schools and one white junior high opened: No Negro child had been assigned to them. Six junior and senior high schools did not open. They were closed under Virginia's massive resistance law. For 10,000 white students and 17 Negroes there were no schools to attend. It was an unbelievable two weeks.

Except for a concerned few, Norfolk viewed the unprecedented event with a strange and this-too-shall-pass attitude. The safety of neutralism was still the most sought-after refuge. It was apathy surrounding chaos, a condition little understood by outsiders. But to those who knew that Virginians dislike their personal lives and their politics to live on the same street, it was near normal.

Even on September 27, when the Norfolk School Board's bid to delay desegregation for one year in the city's schools was turned down by the U. S. Court of Appeals, Fourth Circuit, many Norfolk residents still hoped for some sort of easy plan to avoid desegregation.

CHAPTER 2

The Norfolk Committee for Public Schools

A handful of Norfolk men and women recognized what was to happen. Led by three men—a minister, a college professor, and a social worker--the first tentative steps were taken to save public education in Norfolk. If possible, this group sought to counteract any violence that might be touched off between the races when desegregation occurred. Little Rock was a raw nerve exposed, to be avoided at any cost in Norfolk.

As early as May 1958, fifteen interested citizens had met at a private home to formulate some thinking for future action. If Little Rock, with more adequate preparation, with more progressive steps taken, had resulted in armed chaos, what, these people asked themselves, might happen in Norfolk?

Out of this first unofficial meeting came a rough estimate of the group's purpose and a blueprint for procedure. It would serve as a rallying point in the event of closed schools. Its members would seek the support of prominent citizens of Norfolk. They might have to secure legal aid and to raise funds. They would bombard public officials—local, state, national—with letters of protest.

On September 19, to coincide with federal Judge Hoffman's decision and the announcement of the closing of schools, the Norfolk Committee for Public Schools became news on the pages of *The Norfolk Virginian-Pilot*. "Committee Is Formed to Keep Schools Open," said the headline. The sub-head read, "Rallying Points for Parents." The news story stated further that the Committee had issued a statement of purpose the day before: "It promised to give public support to every effort to keep public schools open by every legal and honorable means." *The Virginian-Pilot's* story named the group's officers and members of its executive committee: A minister; two real estate salesmen; a housewife and P-TA president; a pediatrician; a college professor; a high school teacher; a club woman; a psychiatrist's wife; and, perhaps more pointed than any of the other facts, "another member who requested that his name not be disclosed."

Liaison with the two major newspapers in town was not difficult. Reporters from both papers were interested in a good news story. However, members of the Committee favored *The Virginian-Pilot* over the afternoon *Ledger-Dispatch*. The *Pilot's* policy, led by Editor Lenoir Chambers (the biographer of Stonewall Jackson) had long been intelligent, thoughtful, and liberal. The individual reporters who covered the education, court, and political beats were interested and cooperative. The *Ledger-Dispatch*, owned and operated by the same corporation, Norfolk Newspapers, Inc., that owned the *Pilot* (as well as the largest television and radio stations in Norfolk), was also interested in news, but its editors leaned heavily toward segregation.

In reaching the news media, the Norfolk Committee for Public Schools did well. In its efforts to reach Norfolk's leading business and professional men, the Committee came close to failure. Many of the

prominent men, the vertabrae of the city's financial and social backbone, had adopted a neutral attitude. They would wait and see, they said.

Some of the 30 leaders approached by the NCPS were afraid their business would suffer if they took a stand; others were opposed to desegregation in any form, shape, or size. Segregation was their way of life. They saw no necessity to change it, or to support people who might be trying to do just that. Almost all of these 30 men were involved in some major community charity or drive. They felt it would hurt these worthy charities if they spoke out in favor of any change in the status quo.

"Their decisions were part genuine, part justification," said one NCPS worker in retrospect. "Some of them had good reasons. One man was a National Foundation head He felt if he joined our Committee he would ruin the Foundation's chances for a successful drive, and he may have been right. The Redevelopment people couldn't get involved. Public Health people, stationed in Norfolk, had been told unofficially this was a local fight and none of their business. Bankers and lawyers were out They all had good excuses, easy excuses. That left us."

Of the thirty who were asked to help, 23 refused. Seven agreed to serve as members of the Committee's advisory board. They included a lawyer and a retired juvenile court judge, two business men, the head of Norfolk's park system, a physician, and a retired school principal. Only four of these seven were active. The remaining three dropped out, after permitting the use of their names.

These men were prominent, but with one or two exceptions, they did not represent Old Norfolk or capital S society. They were people who had led honorable lives and had done much for their city. Their names were seen in the newspapers on occasion. Behind them stood the men whose names were not seen often in public print, the men who wielded the real power in Norfolk, financially and socially.

To the Committee's credit, it never stopped trying to persuade every prominent citizen of whom it could think. Public officials were deluged with letters, telegrams, and telephone calls. The Committee took large ads in the papers, stating its purpose and listing those Norfolk citizens who had agreed to the use of their names. The Committee talked with the Navy, with the press, with every individual who wrote an encouraging letter. It established headquarters at a donated downtown office across from the newspaper building, and from here distributed handbills and kept up its work.

Evidence of its determination was the refusal to accept defeat in the search for legal aid. The Committee's leaders realized that legal action would be their David's slingshot during their October 22 visit with Governor Almond. He, candidly, told them that schools would open only when the federal courts would force them open.

They hoped to get a Norfolk lawyer. They tried their first choice, a third, fourth, fifth. The answer—with variations—was negative. A few lawyers were sympathetic, or so they said. But lawyers and politics are close relatives. It became evident that the Norfolk Committee for Public Schools would have to go out of Norfolk for its man. Through the personal acquaintance of one executive board member, a

Washington-Arlington lawyer of great ability was approached. He agreed to serve as legal counsel. One Norfolk lawyer agreed to become associated with him.

On October 27, the first suit, a class action, to reopen the schools was filed by these lawyers, Edmund D. Campbell of Arlington and Archie Boswell of Norfolk, on behalf of 26 white Norfolk school children and their parents. Defendants in the action were Governor Almond, members of the Norfolk School Board, and others. It had been expected that the NAACP would file a school reopening suit. The legal action on the part of white citizens caught everyone off guard. Victor J. Ashe, local NAACP attorney, said the white action would "not alter our plans."

Before the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People could act, however, a second suit was filed by attorney C. Lydon Harrell, Jr., on behalf of his two children (enrolled in closed Blair Junior High School). The children sued through their grandfather, Dr. C. Lyndon Harrell, then director of the Norfolk Red Cross Blood Center.

Three days later, the NAACP brought a similar suit, naming the Governor among the defendants. All three suits were scheduled to be heard before a three-judge federal court: Chief Judge Simon E. Sobeloff of the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals; Circuit Judge Clement F. Haynsworth, Jr.; and District Judge Walter E. Hoffman of Norfolk.

The first suit brought into federal court in the effort to reopen Norfolk's schools had been brought by white citizens. This was unprecedented. (In all other areas it had been Negroes who had instigated the first legal steps.)

Norfolk's Teachers: An Example of Leadership

If one profession turned its back on the Norfolk Committee for Public Schools, another risked its past, present, and future by demonstrating its faith in public education for all: Norfolk's teachers. In a profession often characterized as vacillating and irresolute, Norfolk's teachers rose admirably to the occasion. Nor was their position and their stand an easy one. They were berated by politicians, segregationists, and, unfortunately, some parents. They stood firm.

On October 2 the Norfolk Education Association voted 487 to 89 in favor of a resolution calling upon the City of Norfolk to re-open its secondary schools on a desegregated basis if Governor Almond failed to restore them as a segregated system. Later, when James G. Martin IV, head of the segregationist Tidewater Educational Foundation, sought to lure the teachers into Tidewater Academy, the private school sponsored by the Foundation, the teachers turned him down—unanimously.

"We are shocked and baffled by the refusal of the teachers of the six closed schools who are standing idle refusing to teach their own children . . ." Martin said in early October. At the end of the month Lt. Governor A. E. S. Stephens took the teachers to task: "I say to you, when you pick up the paper and see that a large party of teachers have voted not to participate in the private school movement, you ask

yourself: Where is their loyalty?" Eleven days before, the Norfolk Education Association had voted by a heavy majority of 799 to discontinue teaching by January 1 in the make-shift tutoring groups that had sprung up around the city to aid displaced students.

While the brickbats bounced around their feet, Norfolk's teachers continued to stand for their beliefs and their profession. Their leadership was strong and outspoken. More important: They moved, voted, acted as one solid group.

It would be repetitive to state that educators supported public schools. But there were many private school teachers in the city, as well as college instructors. Generally, they stood as firm and as strong as the public school teachers, although not as a group but as individuals.

In a letter to the editor of *The Virginian-Pilot*, Arthur A. MacConochie, a member of the faculty at Norfolk Academy, an excellent preparatory school for boys, wrote: "Like other independent school people I believe in public education. There is absolutely no other course open to a civilized society for the education of its children. Public schools have their enemies and their detractors: independent school people are not among them . . . There is no other way."

The Established Civic Organizations

While the teachers stood firm, there was evidence of dissent and division in other Norfolk organizations. In late September the Junior Chamber of Commerce met in regular session. In an obviously surprise move, a proposal pledging support for keeping public schools open even if integrated won by a slim majority vote.

No sooner had the resolution been passed by a show of hands than repercussions began. Opponents of the move asked to have it reconsidered at the next meeting. The young dentist who introduced the resolution was a member of the Norfolk Committee for Public Schools.

Swiftly the opposition sought to block any Jaycee action that might dedicate that organization to the public school system. But a simple majority vote ruled. This action produced strong statements from some members that they would quit the Jaycees before they would be a party to the controversial stand.

Even within such an enlightened group as the League of Women Voters, internal strife was felt. In spite of the differences of opinion, the 96 members of the League went on record in favor of public schools. In a letter to Governor Almond they urged him and other state officials to "work out a legal and honorable way to preserve the free public school system of Virginia."

Shortly after, the American Association of University Women, Norfolk Branch, issued a public statement reading in part: "We . . . deplore the present Norfolk school situation and hold that a strong public school system is essential to our survival . . ."

Within the P-TA network there was further confusion and dissension. The Norfolk City Council of Parent-Teacher Associations, an organization composed of all individual P-TA officers and elected representatives, was led by W. I. McKendree, its president and a charter member of the Defenders of State Sovereignty and Individual Liberties,

a segregationist organization. The Council, under McKendree's direction, objected to any P-TA unit taking a stand on the closing of schools. When P-TA members of the closed schools proceeded to meet as usual, McKendree consulted with national and local P-TA parliamentarians to support his claim that there could be no unit where there was no school. Individual P-TA presidents of closed schools contested this ruling, saying McKendree and the Council had no jurisdiction over them. It was their intention to go on with their P-TA work.

The P-TA Council refused to act on any resolutions that asked for the reopening of schools, referring this problem back to the individual units. On another occasion, McKendree objected to the "exploitation of children under any conditions." He was referring to the student rallies and public statements by student groups from the closed schools.

Some individual P-TAs came out early and strong in support of public schools. At the Walter Herron Taylor Elementary School, attended by upper middle class children of the West Ghent section, the vote was 159 to 4 in favor of reopening the schools. At Northside Junior High, one of the six closed schools, 600 irate parents became concerned when there was a delay on the part of the Northside's P-TA in taking a stand on the issue. (In many P-TAs pro-segregation parents had been elected to available offices prior to the school crisis. They tried, unsuccessfully, to prevent their units from making any public statement.)

The Northside parents, many of whom were Navy-connected, staged a rally to urge the City Council to reopen the schools. They wanted the School Board to "know we are behind them and let them see how the parents of Northside feel."

At Willard Junior High, the only white secondary school still open in Norfolk—no Negro had applied there—the P-TA voted 120-53 to adopt a pro-school resolution which was "in essence the same" as the one delayed by the city-wide P-TA Council on September 26. Eventually, all but one P-TA contributed some sort of public statement in favor of reopening schools.

At Maury High School, the P-TA and the Student Association met to adopt a strong resolution urging the City Council to reopen Maury and the five other closed schools at the earliest possible date. At the meeting, attended by an overflow of parents and students, several attempts were made from the floor to give support to Virginia's massive resistance laws. The words of a young Maury girl, president of the Student Association, weighed more heavily: "I'm asking as a student that you please talk about getting our schools open," she said, requesting that they postpone talk of integration and segregation.

CHAPTER 3

The Pro-School Forces in Norfolk

Between the two groups, those opposed to desegregation and those who wanted the schools open in spite of it, there floated the majority of the populace. It was a public alternately confused, vague, ardent, cold, hot. It represented as many separate opinions as it had people. It changed its mind often, when it bothered to think at all. It still did not recognize its ultimate choice: Desegregation, or no free system of public schools.

Aligned with the pro-school forces were certain types of people in Norfolk. The liberal element was pro-school and pro-segregation by its very nature. It was safe to assume that these people came, generally, from the middle class and the upper middle class of the city. More liberals were from the professions, such as medicine, the arts, teaching, than from business. Their cultural interests were more sophisticated, their horizons were broader.

Also pro-school were many Norfolk citizens who had faced the ultimate choice. To these conservative, yet civic-minded, people the abandonment of a free public system of education in their city was unthinkable. It was far better to accept limited—they emphasized the "limited"—desegregation. Their traditional, inbred, middle-class conscience and sense of justice forced them to support the Norfolk Committee for Public Schools, even though they were opposed to desegregation in principle.

Norfolk's ministers and certain of its religious organizations supplied a good share of workers for the schools. Members of the Unitarian Church, true to their liberal principles, supported their minister, who was President of the Norfolk Committee for Public Schools.

There were many Jews—mainly of the Reformed congregation—who were active during the crisis, but only as individuals. It was felt early by Jewish leaders that if Jewish men and women responded as a group, feelings would be directed against them as a minority. It was regarded as important for Jews to act as they believed, but Jewish leaders were afraid of the emotional climate that might develop. The "hate literature" that poured into the city later in the winter confirmed to some extent the stand of the rabbinate.

There were members of other religious groups who were just as ardent in their dedication to the cause of public schools as the Unitarians and Reformed Jews. One outspoken member of the NCPS's executive committee was a prominent Methodist layman. Another was a devout Episcopalian. At the same time, one of the first-line Defenders was a lay minister and teacher in another Methodist church.

Perhaps this indicates a crossing of religious lines which was (and is) typical. It might indicate that a personal religion could be interpreted in different fashions by different people, even when they belonged to the same church.

The Norfolk Minister's Association met in September, representing 74 Protestant churches: Methodist, Presbyterian, Baptist, Episcopal,

Lutheran, Disciples, and Congregational Christian.

In a September 30 editorial in *The Virginian-Pilot*, the stand of these clergymen was commended as follows:

". . . the church—has acted with great speed, commendable boldness, and heartening unanimity. Of 74 Norfolk Protestant clergymen gathered on the day after schools were officially closed, 66 signed a request that city and state leaders take steps immediately to reopen them . . . It was the response of educated men unaffected by politics. It was the response of the institution to which much of Norfolk entrusts its conscience . . . It was a response to evil and peril that this city and this state can not ignore."

Strong words to commend a strong action. The ministers did not stop there. Individual churches, meeting in conference and separately, passed resolution after resolution condemning the situation and asking for the reopening of Norfolk schools. The Tidewater Conference of the Lutheran Synod of Virginia, United Lutheran Church in America, met in Newport News, Virginia, in mid-September, representing 16 churches in the Tidewater area.

Its statement read in part: "The public school system . . . must be upheld and strengthened . . . All parties to the present controversy are in duty bound to follow and uphold due process of law, and to maintain public order . . ."; and, finally, "God calls all men through the Gospel to Christian brotherhood."

There were other pleas and demands, from both small and large churches. The First Church of the Brethren with 50 members; the Oakdale Presbyterian church; the Episcopal bishops convening in Miami Beach, Florida, who said, "Obey the law." Yet, when the Norfolk Minister's Association sent five prominent clergymen to Richmond to see Governor Almond, the results were far from encouraging. Dr. Edgar A. Potts, their spokesman, said that the Governor "believed the schools would reopen eventually but gave no indication when or on what basis the reopening would be effected."

But, most significant, was one sentence in a *Virginian-Pilot* news story concerning the Minister's Association: "The ministers who signed the petition stressed that they spoke as individuals, not as representatives of their congregation." It was bitter but true. The ministers might speak out as individuals, but they could not represent their congregations, many of which were split down the middle.

Informed women of Norfolk, members of the AAUW, the League of Women Voters, the Women's Interracial Council, could generally be counted upon to support a public system of education. They were seemingly more concerned than men to defend the public schools, less worried about desegregation. Many were parents, with children directly affected by the school closing. Early in the fall, for example, the AAUW called upon its members, all of whom possessed at least one college degree, to help with tutoring groups but not to consider them a substitute for public education.

A large segment of Norfolk's population—over 130,000 of 330,000—is and always has been transient in nature. The men and women of the U. S. Navy and their dependents do not come and go overnight, as a traveler lives from motel to hotel. Instead, they live a year or

two or three, sometimes longer, in one place. Often they have bought houses in Norfolk and their children have attended local schools. Moreover, they all have known that sooner or later they would be reassigned to Norfolk. A minimum of two tours of duty in Norfolk is the least a Navy man expects. It is natural, then, that professional sailors count on calling Norfolk home for a good portion of their careers.

In the early days up to and including the second World War, Norfolk was disliked by Navy people. There was little cooperation between the Navy and permanent residents (a phrase still used in Norfolk to distinguish civilians from the military). Navy people were forced to live in the city, but they were determined not to like it.

Gradually the attitudes on both sides began to change. The Chamber of Commerce and high-ranking Navy officials sought each other out. Norfolk became known as a good-duty city. More and more Navy families settled in Norfolk on a permanent basis. Many retired to Norfolk, a real compliment to a city since Navy families see much of the United States and the free world during their "careers."

A good deal of this improved civilian-military relationship evaporated when Norfolk's junior and senior high schools closed. Navy families were trapped. They had to stay until the duration of their tour, but they didn't like it. They were indignant and they were worried. The majority of enlisted men and junior officers could not afford to send their children to private schools. Many who could, preferred public education

They were angered because they knew—in addition to the moral and emotional factors involved—that the City of Norfolk and its surrounding territory in Princess Anne County (part of which was annexed to the city on January 1, 1959) were granted federal impact funds for schools due to the presence of federally-connected personnel in the area.

Norfolk had qualified under Public Laws 874 and 815 for about $1.25 million a year in federal aid for schools. If the city was not to lose this money, it had to "provide free public education." During the year 1957-58 Norfolk had received approximately $463,768 for the daily attendance of 4640 federally-connected children in Norfolk's schools. The government paid $99.95 per child. The remainder of the money, over the $463,768, was for the construction of new schools. The attendance payments would be increased if the number of students increased, as they have for the school year 1959-60.[1]

In late September the Navy's policy on schools, negative as it was, was outlined. Navy personnel could, said Rear Admiral F. Massie Hughes, Commandant of the District, sign statements opposing school closing, but they must not use their official rank or rate, nor must they imply "in any manner that their signature represents either a Navy connection or view."

By the end of November the effects of shuttered schools reverberated in Navy circles. Morale was lowering as fast as a barometer before a hurricane. There was a steady "unofficial" trek to Washington

[1] The increase in the total student body in the City of Norfolk's schools for 1959-60 is due (apart from normal growth) to the 7000 children from an annexed area who attend city schools for the first time.

to seek transfers to other duty stations. The men were, stated Richard Mansfield, military editor of *The Virginian-Pilot*, "looking for the best alternative billets elsewhere." The economic problem was serious. A first class petty officer, for example, with a wife and three children received $343 a month take-home pay. There was no room for extra travel or tuition on this tight budget.

To complicate matters further, a lofty statement from the Chief of Naval Personnel in Washington was issued, declaring that, "reports that the Navy is planning to assign primarily bachelor officers and married officers with no children to the Norfolk area [were] absolute nonsense." This was a formal answer to just one of many rumors wildly flying about. The rumor was given depth and importance, and a certain amount of credibility, by this official denial in the press.

Many Navy men and their wives worked for the Norfolk Committee for Public Schools. They obeyed the official order concerning use of their Navy affiliations, but they chafed under it. The only time a Navy man was seen in uniform, speaking for public schools, was on the early January 1959, Edward R. Murrow television show. Whether this was a slip in protocol or a deliberate gesture is not known. However, the officer who appeared was the public relations man for this area, and it is believed that the Navy's attitude was softening by that time.

A curious note in the situation was the number of physicians who worked on behalf of the public school system. As a group, medical men have not been noted for their dedication to politics. Their profession leaves little time for outside activities. They are often considered narrow in their thinking, other than medical. They are frequently capable of securing the best private education for their children. Their status in the community is high. In Norfolk, physicians are members of the Norfolk Yacht and Country Club and organizations of equally high social prestige. They live in West Ghent, Lochhaven, Larchmont, Algonquin Park—the "proper" sections of town.

Yet on the first executive committee of the Norfolk Committee for Public Schools there was a pediatrician and his wife. The wife of another doctor, a psychiatrist, was an active member. Still another successful physician, (whose wife was a past-president of the Norfolk Junior League), was a member of the Committee's board. A large number of medical men signed up with the Committee, and their names were printed as members in the newspaper ads. Later, when the 100 prominent business men came out in favor of public schools at the 11th hour, only five of those listed were Norfolk Committee for Public Schools members—but four of those five were physicians.

One Norfolk doctor suggested that it was because, in the practice of medicine, a man was his own boss, obligated to no one else. Another doctor said that he felt his referrals might be hurt, but decided to risk it because of his personal beliefs. He found that his practice had not been hurt at all. "You must remember," said another, "that in Norfolk medicine is not too competitive. There is plenty of work around and not too many doctors, except in internal medicine and maybe surgery. Therefore, doctors can be very independent politically.

I don't know if they would have stood up and spoken out in a city where the competition was tough."

It is interesting to note that medical men are in one of the few professions in the South that come in contact with Negroes on a day to day basis. While their field of communication is limited to medicine, it is, at least, a field of communication.

On the Fence

It was unusual when a business man of any age or status publicly supported the side of education. There were a few. A real estate broker was active in the work of the Committee, and held the position of first vice president. Another real estate man was a member of the Committee, and suffered a severe loss of business as a result. He was an active worker, as was his wife, and it was he who became the plaintiff in the federal suit which led to the reopening of the schools.[2]

A few, lone business men spoke out—men of character whose convictions outweighed their fears, or who were so secure in their status that they could do as they pleased. There were six business men on the Advisory Board of the NCPS.

September wore on into October. Hallowe'en month ground on into November and then, December. Still the major business men of Norfolk made no move and kept their own counsel. The excuses and evasions and reasons were both valid and invalid.

Several business men objected to the politics of three members of the NCPS's executive board who were known integrationists and liberals. Even within the Committee, it was argued that all members with any known liberal identifications should resign, or be kept in the background. One member urged that the Committee's job was to make itself acceptable to the public because, he felt, only public pressure would open the schools.

The objections raised to this sort of thinking were practical. If the integrationists on the Committee didn't work for the public schools, who would? The Committee had tried the conservative element in Norfolk, and it wouldn't turn its head. This is the time, said one active worker, when the "little people have to be the big people."

The Norfolk Committee for Public Schools did decide, however, to limit its membership to white citizens. "We always knew we had to be a white group from the start; no one would have accepted us at all if we had it any other way," said one of the officers. When the Committee started collecting funds it decided, therefore, to refuse Negro contributions.

"We were afraid someone might booby-trap the Negroes," said one of the board members. "We knew that our lists might be investigated or even brought to court, so we elected to say 'No' to all the Negroes."

The Committee of 100

Many of the business men who refused to cooperate with the Norfolk Committee for Public Schools did so with what the Committee

[2]Mr. Ellis James, the real estate man mentioned, engaged both Mr. Campbell and Mr. Boswell in his own name for the *James vs. Almond* class suit; Mr. James' daughter, Ruth Pendleton James, was one of the plaintiffs.

conceded to be integrity and honor; yet the support was sorely missed. The hard-working members of the NCPS read with, therefore, the greatest interest, the full page ad in *The Virginian-Pilot* and *Ledger-Dispatch* on Monday, January 26, 141 days after the scheduled opening date of schools, and seven days after the court decision which overruled the massive resistance laws. It was an ad taken by 100 men of prominence:

> While we would strongly prefer to have segregated schools, it is evident from the recent court decisions that our public schools must either be integrated to the extent legally required or abandoned. The abandonment of our public school system is, in our opinion, unthinkable, as it would mean the denial of an adequate education to a majority of our children. Moreover, the consequences would be most damaging to our community. We, therefore, urge the Norfolk City Council to do everything within its power to open all public schools as promptly as possible.

A second and similar ad, signed by a group of younger civic leaders, appeared the next day.

It was difficult, too, for frustrated parents whose children had been out of school for almost five months, to read the statements by which the nation at large welcomed the belated action, statements giving credit to the Norfolk 100 plus 100 for saving the day. Senator Clifford P. Case of New Jersey, for example, said: "Noteworthy among the developments . . . was the emergence of the business community as a positive force for change. Bank presidents, manufacturers, and merchants, disturbed by school closing throughout the state, publicly raised their voices in favor of moderation."

If their action impressed out-of-staters like Senator Case it also influenced Virginians. One would be, however, an idealist if one concluded that it was because these business men were concerned primarily over public schools. If that had been the case they would have made such a statement many months before. Rather, it was a graceful retreat before the onslaught of economic law. These men were finally convinced that closed schools were bad for business.[3]

Students of the 'Lost' Classes

To the students of Maury, Granby, and Norview High, and the junior high schools, school was a fact of life that had disappeared in September. Their shock and disillusionment were real. On September 25, 260 Norview students petitioned the Governor, declaring: "We want Norview to open now!" Junior high students at Northside said, ". . . we ask you to please keep our schools open." They sent their plea to School Superintendent J. J. Brewbaker.

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[3]Norfolk's business men had been exposed to a series of articles and reports on the economic situation, as had everyone else in Norfolk. One report circulated in Norfolk was "Some Economic Aspects of Virginia's Current Educational Crisis" by Lorin A. Thompson of Charlottesville, Virginia. This report stated clearly the financial disaster ahead of Virginia if the state ceased to support its free system of public education. It has since been published in *New South*, February 1959.

On October 16, *The Virginian-Pilot* re-printed a *Business Week* article, called, "What 'Massive Resistance' Costs Norfolk and Its Businessmen." The article hit hard, as did the accompanying editorial. Even the city admitted that closed schools were costing $172,000 a month.

"We want education," was the cry at Blair Junior High School. At Granby, students carried banners proclaiming, "We want school to open," until police guarding the closed schools kept them from rallying on their school grounds. But the students signed a petition, and five Granby High class officers issued a statement to the press saying, "We take an unbiased stand on the issue of public school integration, but we strongly feel the need for public schools at any cost!"

Later, when the schools were open, the Key Clubs of Norview, Granby and Maury High Schools took an ad in the newspapers pleading with students and adults, "that the orderly reopening be completed as smoothly and as quickly as possible so that we may proceed with our immediate objective—to obtain an education." These young men, members of an international (Kiwanis sponsored) organization of high school leaders, said they would try to solve their problems in "a mature manner and under no condition will rowdiness be condoned. We believe," they said, ". . . the students of our respective schools will conduct themselves with a dignity that will bring credit to our city."

News of their statement reached President Eisenhower and he mentioned it in a press conference. The Key Club's statement soon became national and international news.

CHAPTER 4

The City Government's Stand

While parents worried, and students felt outrage and frustration at having their education go up in the smoke of politics, and while the Norfolk Committee for Public Schools worked and wondered, a small group of men hewed to their chosen path: Resistance to desegregation and a program of increasing vindictiveness. These men were the members of the Norfolk City Council and Mayor W. Fred Duckworth.

Mayor Duckworth was aware, or thought he was, of public opinion, which he felt was opposed to desegregation. He knew the state government was. In October, when more than 100 persons jammed the Council chambers to protest the closing of public schools, the Mayor suggested to the press and to the crowd that he was thinking in terms of a referendum on the city's school dilemma. Duckworth was careful to point out that Governor Almond was elected 4-1 on a massive resistance platform, and that the Norfolk vote for him was the highest ever tendered any gubernatorial candidate in over 50 years.

This meeting of the Council was calm and orderly, compared with those that followed, when tempers flared like rockets and calm men exploded in wrath. Sharp, bitter words sliced through the air, particularly between the Mayor and citizens concerned with the school closing. The Mayor got equally furious with the press, because it persisted in quoting him (as far as the law allowed), word for word.

When Protestant clergymen approached Council during a tension-packed meeting, Mayor Duckworth rebuffed the Reverend Edgar A. Potts, their spokesman, with: "If you gentlemen want to help you could talk to the 15 families of the [17] Negro children and try to get them to withdraw. Then we could open these schools tomorrow morning."

Councilman George R. Abbott agreed. He said, "In other words, we've got 17 Negro children who are keeping 10,000 white children out of school."

Duckworth went further to place the blame for the situation on the NAACP. He said Norfolk "has done more for its Negroes, within its limits, than any city in the South—barring none. We have spent 50 million dollars in slum clearance, on schools . . . I hate very much that the NAACP attacked the best city in Virginia in regard to its colored population." Mayor Duckworth alleged that Negroes in Norfolk pay less than 5% of the taxes and make up 75% of the jail population.

Early in the mad game, Duckworth said over and over again, "There is nothing we can say. The schools are under the Governor." But City Council sessions continued to froth, and letters reached the Mayor, a majority of which favored the reopening of public schools. Monsignor Carroll T. Dozier of Norfolk wrote, declaring the school situation was an "unbelievable catastrophe." A Northside Junior High School parent, representing 500 Northside parents, spoke at a council meeting: "We want our schools open. We don't care how they're opened . . . I don't feel one colored child in Northside is going to hurt my two children."

The November Referendum

The referendum on the schools was proposed for November 18. Many citizens pleaded for liberal voting conditions: There were only 49,325 registered voters at that time and of these only 46,000 had paid-up poll taxes. Since the referendum was to be informational and not binding legally, many felt that the polls should be open to non-registered citizens and to those who had neglected to pay their poll taxes.

The city could, in other words, have made its own eligibility rules for voters, but from the beginning it was clear it would not. Thus, some 46,000 eligible voters in a city of over 300,000 would decide the referendum and the voice of the people.

In addition to a limited possible vote, many Norfolk citizens objected to the "loaded" wording of the addendum on the ballot. State Senator Edward L. Breeden, Jr. was among them. The section of the official ballot under fire was titled, "For Information Only, Not To Be Voted On." It read: "In the Event the Closed Schools are returned to the City of Norfolk, and are re-opened Integrated by the City, it will be necessary, because of the loss of State Funds, for every family having a child or children in Public Schools from which State Funds are withheld, to pay to the City a substantial Tuition for each child in or entering such Public School."

The question to be voted on read: "Shall the Council of the City of Norfolk, pursuant to State law, Petition the Governor to return to the City Control of Schools, now closed, to be opened by the City on an Integrated Basis as Required by the Federal Court?" Citizens could vote "For Petitioning the Governor" or "Against Petitioning the Governor."

The editorial page of the *Virginian-Pilot* called the City Council's referendum action, "In Principle, Wrong; In Practice, Confusing." The editors went on to say, "It demonstrates an unwillingness to exercise the leadership in city government which Norfolk has learned over the years to expect as a mark of councilmanic duty and obligation. It runs directly counter to the views and formal recommendations of the Norfolk School Board. It digs thereby a deep and ominous chasm between these two bodies . . . Resort to it is not municipal statesmanship. It is a refusal to face unpleasant but unavoidable facts."

The editorial opinion of the afternoon newspaper, *The Ledger-Dispatch*, followed its established policy. It was in favor of the referendum and defended the action of the Mayor and the City Council.

Members of the Norfolk Committee for Public Schools attempted to get an injunction against City Council to prevent the referendum. Two trys resulted in failure. The Circuit Court Judge in Norfolk ruled against the attempt, as did the Chief Justice of the Virginia Supreme Court.

The vote in the "special informative election" on November 18 was 12,340 *against* petitioning the Governor to return control of the schools to the city. There were 8,712 votes in favor of such a move. The result

of the referendum was roughly 3 to 2, an established voting pattern in Norfolk.[4]

Thus, 21,052 voters in a city of over 330,000 decided the fate of 10,017 school children. The Mayor stated, "The people have spoken."

The referendum hardened the attitude of the city government. The City Council requested, through the School Board, that no public school auditorium in the city be used by any group discussing the school situation. On November 25, the Council assumed complete control of school spending for the coming year. It was a step interpreted as retaliatory in nature. The City Council could, if it controlled the purse strings directly, close Norfolk's Negro schools by January 1, 1959 if the white schools did not open. Schools were placed on a month-to-month budgetary basis, giving the Mayor and the Council complete control over Norfolk's educational system.

Next to feel the lash of the Mayor's wrath were the teachers. In late November the Mayor had a brisk exchange with School Superintendent J. J. Brewbaker, who said flatly, "We have good teachers." Duckworth's answer was: "Well, I wouldn't go into that now . . . With what some of them have done, along with others in your system, I would have to disagree with you." Earlier the Mayor had intervened on behalf of the segregationist Tidewater Educational Foundation to get James G. Martin IV, its director, an audience with the Norfolk Education Association. The Mayor had been angered when the teachers turned a deaf ear on Martin's request that they throw their weight behind the private school movement by teaching in his Academy.

On January 13 the Council adopted a resolution to withhold all funds from secondary schools in the city. In effect, this would have closed only Negro schools since the white schools—with one exception—were already closed. Another 7000 children would have been affected. It is to Norfolk's credit that a storm of protest broke over this move. Even the Governor made a statement:

"I have never harbored any feeling of retaliation," he said. Closing Negro schools, he further stated, "would be a vicious and retaliatory blow against the Negro race. I would not want to be charged with harboring such a spirit."

In U. S. District Court on Tuesday, January 27, a week after Virginia's school closing laws had been voided by both federal and state courts, Judge Walter E. Hoffman returned the control of school funds to the Norfolk School Board and barred the City Council from withholding them. Norfolk's schools were now again under the direct jurisdiction of the School Board and would open on a desegregated basis on Monday, February 2. The city's "massive resistance" program had fallen, as had the state's, before the judgment of the courts.

Throughout the zigzag series of events, the School Board found itself aligned against the City Council and the Mayor, whether it intended to be so placed or not. As early as October 4, four members

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[4] It was thought by many observers of the Norfolk political scene that a 3 to 2 election result could be predicted in almost any city election. On November 4, 1958, for example, the city voted 3 to 2 to support Senator Harry Flood Byrd, the Democratic nominee, over Dr. Louise Wensel, independent candidate for the U. S. Senate. Dr. Wensel had supported a free public system of schools, and proposed that Virginia integrate its schools prior to federal court order.

of the Board stated, individually, to a reporter for *The Virginian-Pilot*, that they would prefer integration to closed schools. A few weeks later, in defining the position of the Norfolk School Board in the referendum, Chairman Paul Schweitzer gave an answer to the Mayor's accusation that the Board was playing politics: "I don't intend to be involved in politics. I intend to inform people of the facts and let them make up their minds."

Generally speaking, the School Board was in the position of a man stuck in a hole, half in and half out. Most Norfolk citizens felt that the board members did their best in a tough spot.

There was a certain stiffness between the School Board and the City Council at various times during the ordeal. It must be remembered that the members of the School Board, successful business and professional people, had received little help from their fellow citizens of prominence. Each member served without pay throughout the night-and-day crisis—just as he would have done under normal conditions. The difference was that the board sessions were frequent, long, and disturbed. Sometimes they lasted far into the night. Abuse was heaped on the members from many sources, particularly from the segregationist camp. The Board members had resisted as long as they could in the school matter, and then had swung to the side of moderation. They were found to be considered wrong from both views, fore and aft, because they were, above all, five men and one woman squarely in the middle.

Public Opinion—Apathy and Frustration

On the other hand, thousands of Norfolk citizens still refused to believe anything that they didn't want to believe—or think about—perhaps on the theory that if they didn't talk about schools maybe they wouldn't go away.

The Norfolk Education Association became concerned with what it considered to be a peculiar contentment on the part of the public towards the hastily organized, stop-gap tutoring groups, the majority of whose teachers were displaced public school instructors. Some parents claimed that their children had never had a better education. And the parents could not be blamed entirely. In recent years, the trend of educational criticism has been in favor of smaller classes, individual attention, fewer frills, stronger attention given to the basics. Here, the parents seemed to say, we have just this situation in the tutoring groups. We have good teachers, small classes, individual attention. Who wants public schools anyway?

The factors the parents glossed over in their search for justification were obvious to any educator. There were no maps, libraries, laboratories, visual aids, supplies, books. The physical conditions were poor: Crowded living rooms of private homes, empty stores with inadequate lighting and seating, basements with no ventilation, church auditoriums and sanctuaries. Only a professional teacher, perhaps, can understand that the physical situation can aid or hinder teaching and learning. These were forced-march conditions.

Tutoring groups were necessary, just as any shelter is welcomed

by a man who has lost his home in a storm. But to choose the temporary shack over the permanent home was resignation from human progress.

Throughout the city some of the educational needs of 3,000 students were being taken care of in these groups. As early as October 18, public school teachers recognized that the groups were producing a complacent-parent atmosphere. A. Rufus Tonelson, principal of Maury High, advised that public school teachers stop assisting with the tutoring groups by the first of the year.

The Tidewater Educational Foundation had learned to its sorrow and failure that a school without a teacher was no school at all. James G. Martin IV, founder, had wanted his operation to be "completely private in all respects, with private buildings, private teachers, private money, and private textbooks . . ." He found that "private teachers" meant just that. None of the public school teachers had been enticed into his segregationist private system.

Miss Mary D. Johnson, immediate past president of the Norfolk Education Association, stated the position of the teachers succinctly: "We, as teachers, are deeply concerned about public schools and we feel that no system of private schools or private tutoring can adequately and efficiently replace our public schools . . ."

Individual teachers were disturbed and bitter. "It was the most frustrating experience I have ever been through," said one. Another, equally frank, said, "The effect on the teachers was a feeling of insecurity, frustration, and discouragement—a feeling that still exists because of the uncertainty of the future. To see the work to which they have devoted many years of dedicated service destroyed by prejudice and politics was a calamity almost beyond comprehension."

But what of the 7,000 students who were not in tutoring groups? Some left school for good, to seek their fortunes in early marriage or in jobs that did not require a high school diploma. The June 1959 graduating class of Maury High School numbered only 128; there should have been close to 270, enrollment as of the summer of 1958. At Granby High School, 173 graduated out of an original class of 251. At Norview the story was the same: 150 out of 309.

Other students continued their education. Nine hundred and forty were taken in at night school in the neighboring city of South Norfolk. About 500 were admitted as tuition students to other high schools in surrounding cities and towns. Many were sent away by their parents to relatives and friends in other states, some as far as California and Maine.

In one family, for example, the oldest girl was sent to Glens Falls, New York, to stay with friends and attend the local high school. The middle child, also a daughter, was admitted to the Country Day School, a private school at Virginia Beach, seventeen miles from Norfolk. The youngest, a son, was taught at the College of William and Mary's tutoring group. All three are now back in the public school system.

Another mother and father found educational refuge for their daughter with friends in Florida. Their son was sent to a military school in Georgia. (Private out-of-state schools set up recruiting stations in Norfolk during the crisis.) The mother was forced to take a full-time job to support the high tuition payments and travel expenses.

The Tidewater Educational Foundation claimed it had 2,277 registrations by early October—but, no teachers. After the Norfolk Education Association gave the Foundation the cold shoulder, TEF was forced to refund tuition money. James G. Martin IV, the Foundation's head, angrily charged that the public school teachers sabotaged the TEF by advising their students not to attend. A total of 270 students finally entered Tidewater Academy, held at Bayview Baptist Church, where the minister was an outspoken segregationist. They were taught by volunteer parents and retired teachers.

A section of the "city" that went begging for attention and received none from either side was the 13.5 square miles just outside city limits, known as "the annexation territory." In this unique political no man's-land lived 33,000 people, mostly young and in the child-bearing and child-raising years. Their homes were located in flat land that a few years before had been farm country and swamp. This area had been annexed to the City of Norfolk, effective January 1, 1959. Long before that date, its citizens knew that Princess Anne County no longer considered them worthy of political notice; the city was delaying its interest in their welfare until the legal date of annexation.

The lack of adequate school facilities had long been a sore point with the "new" residents. The sub-divisions had boomed into existence overnight, as similar projects have appeared on the fringes of established cities all over the country, and little consideration had been given to schools for the thousands of children who poured into the area. Many of the homeowners were Navy, but there was an equal number of new-to-Norfolk civilians who had come to the expanding city to stay. Politically, the residents were undirected; their voting record was poor; their civic interests were devoted to neighborhood civic leagues.

In not assessing the potential of this area the Norfolk Committee for Public Schools failed. So, for that matter, did the Defenders of State Sovereignty and Individual Liberties. It was—and is—an area of undetermined politics. If appealed to properly, its citizens might have helped to influence the city government and the public.

The Power of the Grapevine

Rumor is one of the most elusive but potent forces in every natural and human disaster. During Norfolk's school crisis, the grapevine twisted and turned. It never stopped producing. Some of the rumors bore the fruit of truth, some disappeared into sterility. Their power influenced strategy and created action where before there had been none.

Rumor of a bomb planted in *The Virginian-Pilot* Sunday Room evacuated the building, and caused a square block downtown to be cordoned off by the police and fire departments. There was no bomb.

Rumor said that a meeting was called in downtown Norfolk a few days before the 100 prominent men made their public stand. At the meeting, rumor said, were high-ranking Navy officials and gold-edged Norfolkians. Pressure was said to have been put on the influential men of the city to open the schools, or the Navy would pull out of Norfolk. Once before, when naval forces were cut-back during the Depression, the Navy had departed, leaving an undiversified ghost town in

its wake. It was, said a prominent Norfolk psychiatrist, "fear of the Navy and of what they could do," that gave substance to the rumor.

Rumor said that two powerful Norfolk business men had been called to a meeting in Richmond, attended by equally important men from throughout the state. This gathering, rumor said, was told by representatives of huge banking and mortgaging interests that the school situation had to be cleared up immediately or serious economic repercussions would be felt in Norfolk. Again, this was a rumor based on fearful truths: Closed schools can frighten off new business; Southern school bonds were "soft" in the mortgage markets of the North.

News Spotlight on Norfolk

If some citizens of Norfolk refused to recognize a crisis when it fell on them, the "outside" world was quick and curious to see what was happening. Newspaper reporters from New York, Chicago, Washington, even London, converged on the city. Typewriters and extra desk space were at a premium in the City Rooms of *The Virginian-Pilot* and *The Ledger-Dispatch*. Major newspapers, magazines and other news media had run story after story on Norfolk. In *The New York Times Magazine* of January 4, 1959, James Stokely and Wilma Dykeman did a feature piece entitled, "Report on 'The Lost Class of '59'." Its sub-head told the story: "Their high schools closed by Virginia's 'massive resistance' to integration, Norfolk seniors see their chances for diplomas and college going up in the smoke of controversy."

Charles L. Whipple of *The Boston Sunday Globe* made the front page of that paper's Sunday, October 12, issue with his "Virginia Children Hungry for School" article. It began, "If ideas of white supremacy are dying in the Old Dominion they sure are dying hard."

Time devoted its front cover to Governor Almond of Virginia on September 22 and carried a lead story on Virginia, Norfolk, schools, and the Governor, comparing him unfavorably to Thomas Jefferson. Rumor said the Governor was furious. Another Luce publication, *Life*, covered "the lost class," too. So, it seemed at the time, did everyone else.

Nor was the story left to newspapers and magazines. On November 29 the Norfolk story was the subject of a half-hour broadcast to 350 radio stations across the country. Conducting the series of interviews was Edwin Randall of the Friendly World Broadcasting Co. of Philadelphia. Members of the Norfolk Committee for Public Schools were interviewed, as was Paul Schweitzer, School Board Chairman, and John F. Rixey, Norfolk delegate to the State Legislature.

Also in late November, a team of CBS cameramen and editors was busy filming the Norfolk story for Edward R. Murrow. In a town-meeting setting both sides of the school controversy were filmed. Members of the NCPS helped to supply the 30 speakers for the program. Later, brought up to date due to legal developments, and including an interview by Murrow of Governor Almond, "The Norfolk Story" was telecast nationally over CBS in early January, 1959, as part of the Murrow-Friendly series "See It Now."

Murrow's telecast helped crystallize half-formed opinions. Its national top television time, and the reputation of Murrow, impressed many Norfolkians who could no longer deny the facts.

CHAPTER 5

Norfolk's Segregationists

Much has been said about the Norfolk Committee for Public Schools, teachers, and all those who supported a system of public education. But, what of those who opposed it? What of those who fought equally hard and long—and are still fighting—to prevent the Supreme Court's decision from becoming a legal reality? In the state of Virginia and in Norfolk there is no doubt that the opposition was led by one major organization: The Defenders of State Sovereignty and Individual Liberties. This organization was started in Virginia just after the Supreme Court decision. In early 1955 there was a Norfolk chapter recruiting membership and funds.

Who are its members? The official membership list is secret. At no time during the school crisis was any such list published. The Norfolk Committee for Public Schools' membership was an open book. Occasionally, in the newspapers, names of one or two Defender leaders were mentioned, but it was unusual rather than common. Known Defenders in Norfolk, however, included a prominent lawyer, a high school history teacher, several well-known business men, an engineer, an orthopedic surgeon, several members of the Norfolk Junior League, and many others.

In the application for membership, the Defenders state their political and moral beliefs quite clearly:

We believe:

In the sovereignty of states and the individual liberties which our forefathers fought for and placed in the Bill of Rights of the Constitution.
In the preservation of racial integrity,
In the education of all children,
In a society based on racial separateness,
In the separation of church and state,
In the precious heritage handed down to us by our forefathers,
That our objectives are in the best interests of both races.

If there was any doubt of their position after reading these words, they further stated: "We *can* defeat integration! . . . Laws *can* be changed . . . We of the Defenders are working toward that goal."

The Defenders claimed membership in the "thousands . . . from all parts of this state and other states. Included in this membership are U. S. Congressmen, many members of our state legislature, county and city officials, judges, lawyers, doctors, ministers, educators, other leading business men and thousands of Christian women, housewives and people from all walks of life." There is undoubtedly truth in this claim.

The Defenders were the advance guard of masses of Virginians who preferred segregation. On November 14 they sponsored a rally at the city-operated Center Theater, just prior to the November 18 referendum. Representative John Bell Williams of Mississippi was the

speaker. Earlier, according to the *Ledger-Dispatch*, the Defenders had been "saturating Norfolk residents with a barrage of home-delivered literature . . . An estimated 30,000 packages of the literature have already found their way to Norfolk doorsteps." Prior to November 26, when the City Council suppressed use of the city school auditoriums for groups planning to discuss the school situation, the Defenders had a standing engagement for the fourth Thursday of each month at one of Norfolk's elementary schools.

To compare the Defenders of 1955-59 (and beyond) with the old K.K.K. would be a mistake. True, the purpose is the same: White supremacy. The Defenders are as firmly dedicated to the perpetuation of racial prejudice and of a segregated way of life. But the difference is to be found in the members themselves. The Defenders are not illiterate, ignorant rabble-rousers. Such people do exist on the outer fringes, as they always exist, dull but thorough experts in hatred. But the other Defenders were men of intelligence, position, and education. The organization may have had some of the aspects of a secret society, and it may have moved in secret when necessary; but its supporters came from the respectable strata of Southern society. It was this factor that made them formidable opponents of desegregation —and will continue to do so.

During late 1958 there was a rush of pamphlets, flyers, and direct mail into the city, all of which could be categorized as "hate literature." Most of the young business men in Norfolk received at least one of these anti-Negro, anti-Jew, anti-labor tracts (published by American Nationalist of Inglewood, California) at their offices. Extra copies, the tracts stated, were available for distribution at a nominal fee. They were lavishly illustrated with photographs showing Negroes and whites together in social situations, entitled, "Mongrelization Unlimited!"

Common Sense, which called itself the "Nation's Anti-Communist Newspaper," was also distributed in the City of Norfolk. Published since 1948 by the Christian Educational Association of Union, New Jersey, the slim paper is dedicated to attacks on Negro and Jewish leaders and to prevention of "mongrelization." Additional material in pamphlet and book form was also available, said the publishers.

Messrs. Childress and Howell, both political newcomers, who were thought not to have had a chance.

Flushed with victory, the Norfolk Committee for Public Schools plans to stay in politics. It is now casting a weather eye on the City Council elections of July 1960, when three seats will be emptied.[5] Success has a sweet smell, after many months of hard work and discouragement.

Immediately after the primary, suit was brought by defeated House candidate Hal J. Bonney and 19 others. The action sought to throw out the vote of eight predominantly Negro precincts. It charged most Negro voters in Norfolk were not eligible to vote in the primary because they had failed to support Senator Harry F. Byrd, the Democratic nominee, in the 1958 general election.

A counter suit was filed three days later by winning candidates Breeden, Childress, and Howell asking dismissal of Bonney's suit, claiming that Bonney and his running mates waived their right to challenge the election when they failed to do so at the polls. It also claimed that specific votes to be disputed were not named and that the case was taken to court based on laws for general elections rather than on primary election laws.

In August, a three-man court dismissed Bonney's suit for lack of preparation and evidence. It is thought, generally, that the Defenders did themselves no good by attempting to contest the primary election and the Negro vote.

All did not go smoothly, however. On June 18, 1959, testing began of 23 Negro applicants who sought to enter white or predominantly white schools in September 1959. Of the 23 tested—against 10 criteria, from social adjustment to historical knowledge—the Norfolk School Board approved two, refused 21. Applications were then forwarded to the State Pupil Placement Board. In mid-summer this body refused the two applications.

The action of the Norfolk School Board in refusing all but two Negro applicants antagonized many Negroes in Norfolk and created suspicion in the minds of some white citizens. One Negro leader commented on the School Board's decision as follows:

"While we consider the situation normal right now, we feel that more of the Negro children should have been accepted. It is foolish of the School Board to accept only two. This will drive the Negro community to apply in greater numbers. If only 2 out of 23 were accepted, then why not try 230 applications or more next year?"

The School Board had recommended to the state Pupil Placement Board the assignment of two additional Negro children: One to Maury High and the other to an elementary school. Thus, for the first time in Norfolk a lower grade school would be desegregated. The Placement Board rejected the recommendation, and also deferred action on the

[5] In an unexpected move in mid-February, 1960, George R. Abbott resigned his seat on the Norfolk City Council after 18 years of service. Mayor Duckworth and the Council immediately appointed Paul Schweitzer, chairman of the School Board, as Abbott's successor. The choice of Schweitzer was a political surprise. It is thought that the Council moved to create a three-man "harmony ticket" for the upcoming June 14 Councilmanic elections. Three men will be up for re-election: L. L. Layton, L. C. Page, and Schweitzer—now filling Abbott's spot. This ticket is seen as an attempt to discourage any opposition slate which might be forming and to cut the ground from under the opposition on the school issue.

routine assignment of two of the "17", who had completed junior high school, to a senior high. In a counter move, the names of these four students appeared along with 21 other Negro students in a protest filed with Judge Hoffman and heard by him in late August. The outcome of the hearing, to which the Judge had summoned the three members of the Placement Board, was a directive to the city's schools to enroll the four plus three others who had not been recommended by the Norfolk board, and to do so on a temporary basis, pending the court's study of the Placement Board's reasons for rejection. The number of Negroes in bi-racial classes for 1959-60 was to be, therefore, 21: 16 from the previous year (one of the "17" had left school), and five new students. Judge Hoffman's action in ordering the admission of two of the three students added by him was interesting and potentially of great import. He held that placement tests could not be administered to Negroes seeking entrance to a school *already* desegregated, unless given to all students entering the school; consequently, these particular two Negroes either had to be admitted (they were), or tests given to all white children in the same situation.

On October 22, the court again called before it the members of the Pupil Placement Board, and at the conclusion of a show-down hearing told the Board to assign the Negro students, "or else face the consequences." The next day the judge set a deadline of November 2, and with this clearly implied warning of a contempt citation facing it, the Board on the appointed day officially approved the assignment of the Negro students. This was the first—and still the only—assignment by the Board of Negroes to desegregated schools in Virginia. Judge Hoffman, however, was not yet through with the Pupil Placement Board; on December 9, he issued a formal order relieving the Norfolk School Board of any further responsibility to deal with the state Placement Board; the order, he said was to remain in effect until the Placement Board told his court that it had changed its policies.

The City Council and the Mayor have also been busy. A crash building program has been rushed through, concentrated on five to ten room neighborhood facilities. Two new Negro schools have been built in sections of Norfolk where white schools had been located closer to Negro students than available Negro facilities. (It is not clear that the neighborhood school building was planned because of the desegregation situation. Because Norfolk's schools are over-crowded by 7000 annexation area students, an active school construction program is necessary. Aside from racial issues, many feel there is merit in the smaller, decentralized school buildings, particularly for the elementary grades.)

Three new members to the School Board were appointed by City Council to replace two members whose terms had been completed. The third appointment was created, it is suspected, to throw the balance of power to the Mayor and the City Council if any sort of future school crisis arises.

Many Norfolk residents were angered over the School Board appointees. One new Board member is a woman instrumental in the work of the segregationist Tidewater Educational Foundation. She had been one of its officers, resigning just prior to her School Board assignment.

The other two appointees seemed, at first, political unknowns. In early September, however, one of the new appointees, Levi J. Roberts, exchanged sharp words with Superintendent of Schools J. J. Brewbaker, at a School Board meeting, over the Norfolk Education Association. Roberts attacked what he claimed was forced membership in NEA, thust upon unwilling teachers. No one had put any pressure on Norfolk teachers to join. Letters to the editor, editorials, and much public comment followed this action.

The City Council reinstated the 30-day cancellation clause in all Norfolk teachers' contracts over the protests of the superintendent of schools, the NEA, and the individual teachers. In the unlikely event schools should close again, Norfolk's teachers would be unprotected. They could be released from their contracts without recourse. The Council's attitude seemed retaliatory and lacking in good faith to many. Rumor says that the Mayor and some Council members are still rankled by the teachers' firm stand for open schools in 1958.

CHAPTER 7

Private and Public Schools Now

There are a number of private schools in Norfolk, the majority of which are on the nursery and elementary level or are denominational. Over the last year, there has not been any appreciable increase in their number due to desegregation. Several established private schools, such as Norfolk Academy (for boys) and Carolton Oaks (boys and girls), have stated publicly that they will refuse state tuition payments. They are not, they said, interested in capitalizing on the current situation.[6]

The one noticeable exception to this attitude is the Tidewater Academy, sponsored by the segregationist Tidewater Educational Foundation. This past summer, the Foundation purchased a $75,000 mansion in downtown Norfolk for its school. It was necessary to launch a fund-raising campaign to obtain funds for the purchase. The campaign ran into difficulties. After several months of financial maneuvering, the Foundation obtained the funds necessary for the downpayment. The remainder of the purchase price will be paid off over a period of years (the mortgage is held by interested individuals rather than any investment concern).

Tidewater Academy opened with 186 students in September, 1959, seventh through twelfth grades.

Desegregation has not affected enrollment in the Norfolk public school system. To the contrary, the student level is at an all time high. This is due, for the most part, to the additional student load of over 7000 taken in from the annexation area. Enrollment in mid-September was 49,700, and rose to 50,000 or more by October 31 due to late enrollments, common in transient-high Norfolk.

At the end of September, 179 applications for state tuition grants ($250) had been received by the school system—81 of these were from students attending the Tidewater Academy. (A total of 250 application forms were requested, 200 of which were sent to Tidewater Academy and 30 of which were for out-of-city students, according to Assistant Superintendent E. L. Lamberth.)

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[6] Both private schools mentioned have accepted tuition grants since making this statement, but to a minor degree compared to Tidewater Academy, the Baylake Pines Private School, and other smaller private schools. The number of tuition grants requested rose to about 486 as of January, 1960.

CHAPTER 8

Looking Back

The most significant failure in the Norfolk school crisis was that of established leadership. Prior to the Summer of 1958, there were certain accepted leaders in the city and state. They led a public that rarely bothered to register, pay its poll tax, or vote. They led a public that refrained from giving a political opinion when it was possible to avoid it. (Nice people didn't discuss politics.) Seldom was Norfolk angry or disturbed enough to question its leaders. It seemed to have blind faith in them.

In the summer before the crisis rose to confront Norfolk and the South, a handful of men and women, who later formed the nucleus of the Norfolk Committee for Public Schools, went to the Mayor and the City Council to discuss the coming school situation. At that time, this group was greeted with acceptance and good will. Its members were told that the time was not yet ripe for a "formal" appearance of any public school group. The Mayor said that he thought Norfolk citizens would support public schools over segregation if any sort of serious situation developed.

It was never the intention of these civic-minded few to carry the public school movement on their own backs. They felt they could start it, interest more important Norfolk citizens, then retire from the scene to help in whatever small way they could.

"We thought we could create an atmosphere of acceptance," said one of these men, a college professor. "We never thought we would have to carry the battle. We thought it wouldn't be necessary. We thought the important people would help, after we got it started."

Thus, in Norfolk (as now in Atlanta) it was rank and file people who became the leaders, while the "power structure" sat in stony silence. In Norfolk it was the middle-class citizen, average and respectable, who carried the unaccustomed weight of leadership. For many, it was a new and frightening experience.

It might seem that the actions of the Norfolk Committee for Public Schools, the Norfolk Education Association, the Parent-Teacher Association, and other civic groups, were small when weighed against the coercive power of the courts. There is no doubt that without the federal court, the weapons of these groups would have been limited.

Even with this in mind, it would be unthinking and unfair to reject their contribution during the school crisis. They were there and they spoke out, filling a vacuum that needed to be filled, serving as headquarters and rallying point.

Their actions, plus all others of a constructive nature, should not have to be divorced from others. The legal decisions of the federal court helped to open the schools. So did the Norfolk Committee for Public Schools; the teachers in refusing to join in the segregationist private school movement; the Women's Interracial Council through its past educational program; the ministers who emphasized the moral and ethical sides of the crisis; Norfolk citizens who allowed the schools to

open without violence or incident; Norfolk's business men when they spoke out. Each contributed to the whole.

Schools are now open in Norfolk. They are desegregated. There is no violence. The people who worked to bring these things about have achieved them and something more. This is perhaps best expressed in a letter to the editor, *Virginian-Pilot*, September 26, 1959, from an active worker on behalf of schools:

"I want to thank the *Virginian-Pilot* for being an effective organ of expression and the Committee for Public Schools for being an effective instrument of action. As a result of my close association with the Committee for Public Schools, the past year which might have been filled only with bitterness and frustration became stimulating, interesting and rewarding.

"We did get the schools open . . . This is something that the average citizen of Norfolk did not seem to realize even while many were taking advantage of the open schools of the second semester. The court cases which directly opened the schools were not nebulous things brought by high officials—financed by taxpayers' money. They were brought by parents like myself, paid dollar by dollar by private citizens. Even knowing the effort involved, it still seems to me amazing—and impressive—that "little people" with no previous experience could do a job so overwhelming . . . In short, by joining a community controversy which affects me, I became a part of the community . . ."

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